

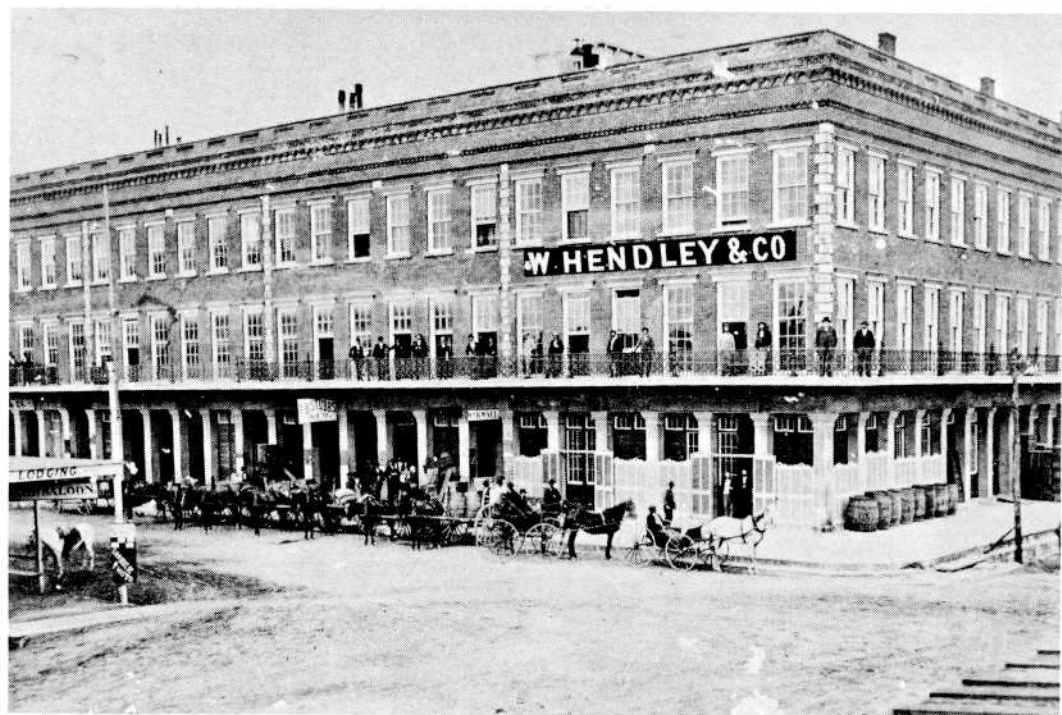
## A Brief History of Galveston District Headquarters

The subject of historic landmarks suggests one final topic that belongs in the Galveston District's story. As the workload and personnel strength of the district have fluctuated over the past ninety-five years, so has grown the need for suitable headquarters. Following the makeshift facilities at Fort Point during the gabion jetty project, the Galveston engineers have maintained offices in some of the city's more distinctive edifices.

The structure that housed the first district offices was erected in stages between 1855 and 1859. Of Greek Revival architectural design, featuring granite columns and topped with a brick cornice, the pretentious Hendley Building was constructed with "the permanency of Corinth." First commercial building in Galveston, it has figured prominently in the history of the city. Throughout the Civil War, an observatory to monitor the Union blockade in the harbor was maintained on the roof of the corner section in which Major Mansfield later occupied space after his arrival in 1880. A focal point in the Battle of Galveston in 1863, when the Confederates regained control of the city, the Hendley Building still bears scars of the barrage of artillery during the encounter.<sup>1</sup>

By 1888, the Galveston Engineer Office had vacated the suite in the Hendley Building and moved to the Alvey Building, 319 Twenty-second

*Hendley Building (Rosenberg Library)*





*Post Office Building (Photograph by Ken Bonham)*

Street, on the northwest corner of Market and Twenty-second. No longer standing, this building housed the engineer offices for almost a decade.

The 1896-97 *City Directory* lists the engineers at a third address, the Telephone Building, located on the northwest corner of Twenty-second and Church streets. These quarters were occupied by the Galveston Engineer Office through the turn of the century.<sup>2</sup>

In 1895, the Galveston Chamber of Commerce had contemplated construction of “a *modern* eight story office building” on the northeast corner of Tremont and Postoffice streets. In a letter addressed to Maj. A. M. Miller, the chamber touted the future Trust Building, concluding:

I send you this information knowing that you and the other gentlemen of the service fully realize what such accommodations as those proposed mean to the occupants, and hoping that by so doing I will be furthering the desires of our Chamber toward securing the cream of the office renters of the city for a building that will undoubtedly, in every way fully supply their necessities and desires.<sup>3</sup>

The “cream of the office renters” were ensconced in the new Trust Building by the time the 1901-02 *City Directory* was published. This building headquartered the Galveston engineers for approximately the next thirty-seven years.<sup>4</sup>

By 1938, the district engineer had relocated his office to the third floor of the new U.S. Post Office Building on Twenty-fifth Street. With the personnel force growing to meet the needs of expanding flood-control work, supplementary space was obtained in the Customs House on Strand and in the Trust Building by the end of the year.

Space demands mushroomed with the onset of military work occasioned by World War II. The early 1940s found district personnel scattered throughout the Post Office Building, the Trust Building, the Customs House, the old Federal Building at Twentieth and Postoffice, and the Santa Fe Building. In 1941, the district began occupancy of this railroad terminal building, a fine example of the art deco style of the twenties and thirties. By 1944, the district engineer was installed there and district headquarters were consolidated into the Santa Fe Building, the Post Office Building, and the Customs House. This decentralized arrangement endured until April, 1974, when the Galveston District moved into its own building for the first time.

*Santa Fe Building (Rosenberg Library)*





*Essayons Building (Photograph by Ken Bonham)*

Located on reclaimed land at the eastern end of the island, not far from Fort Point where the district's history began, the contemporary Essayons Building is named for the time-honored Corps of Engineers motto — Let us try! — a throwback to the eighteenth century days when an engineering education could be obtained only in France. In this single-story concrete structure, Galveston District personnel were reunited under one roof for the first time since 1938.

Settling into the Essayons Building, the district made plans to celebrate the two-hundredth birthday of the Corps of Engineers. Commemorating this event, ceremonies were held and a plaque and historical marker were placed on the Hendley Building on June 16, 1975. Among other activities of the festive Bicentennial Week was an open house in the new headquarters featuring guided tours, exhibits of engineering tools and equipment, environmental and historical displays, boat trips through Galveston Harbor, a band concert, and many other attractions. The open house offered a microcosmic taste of the manifold projects that comprise the work of the district.

1. Howard Barnstone, *The Galveston That Was* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1966), pp. 29-36.
2. *General Directory of the City of Galveston 1896-1897* (Galveston: Morrison & Fourmy, 1896), p. 8.
3. C. H. McMaster to Miller, 26 October 1895, File no. 206-09, Doc. 41, Correspondence 1897-1943, Galveston District Installation Historical Files.
4. *General Directory of the City of Galveston 1901-1902* (Galveston: Morrison & Fourmy, 1901), p. 26.